

Strong reasons to regulate emissions

Editorial

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It is not without good reason that regulators and monitors are tightening restrictions and reporting procedures on mercury emissions.

It is progress that the industry is implementing recommendations and improved monitoring technology and that regulators are taking action to improve oversight. If watchdog groups, like Great Basin Mine Watch, suggest more needs to be done, they should get a hearing.

Certainly, it takes initiative and resources to reduce mercury emissions before they get into the environment. If that can protect the public's health and safety, as well as the industry's position in the economy, it needs to be part of the permitting process.

An industry whose companies trade on the New York Stock Exchange certainly will want to be responsible members of the community and be accountable for its activity. Otherwise, its position in the market could be damaged.

The industry is aware, certainly, of the degree to which precious metals mining, which emits significant amounts of mercury into the atmosphere, plays a major role in Nevada's industrial landscape. That knowledge is the impetus to look closely and often at the impact of the emissions that come from smokestacks and ends as pollution in the air, the water and in wildlife. That is especially true for mercury.

Mercury, a metal, is released into the atmosphere as a byproduct of ore roasting and refining. It is a neurotoxin that is found to be dangerous to children and fetuses. If hard numbers are not available and miners are only estimating their count, even the suspicion that mercury emissions are being seriously underreported should be taken seriously. Accountability goes directly to those issues.

The truth is that the industry has admitted underreporting during a five-year period. If more detailed and more frequent oversight of emissions that come from smokestacks would protect the public health and welfare, no miner or agency officials should object to the additional effort.

Nevadans would like to see the hard results of measurements of smokestack emissions before and after installation of new technology. They want to know how much remains in nearby communities and what the aggregate effect will

be on them and their children. State officials who already are involved in oversight, are the obvious agents for this work.